



Raising Money Year-Round

Posted by [Pierluigi Oliverio](#) on Monday, August 25, 2008

City Hall Diary

From my experience in running for elected office, one of the difficult hurdles was raising money. Now I don't have a problem "asking" for money per se. However, the difficulty for me was "who" I should take money from and who I shouldn't. Who I take money from during an election can equate to access and/or even the perception of personal favors later when in elected office.

Traditionally, you have a few places you can go to raise money. One is the labor unions, who have a big stake in government since their business model relies on their dues-paying membership expanding. Another is the lobbyist community that wants to have as much access as possible to elected officials, since a large part of the value for their clients is relationships. Yet another place to raise money for local government is from housing developers, since cities decide how to zone a parcel of land and what will be built on it.

For me, I concentrated on raising money from friends and family first, then others second, including calling friends from grade school is an excuse to connect.

However, raising money only starts when you are campaigning. It does not end once the campaign (election) is over; the raising of money continues. Once you are in office, elected officials are allowed to have a "friends account." A friends account allows elected officials to solicit donations year-round to pay for things they want in addition to their office budgets, or to use on things they are not allowed to pay for from an office budget. I never set up a friends account because I did not want to be beholden to anyone or start campaigning for the next office. I believe once the election is over, so is raising money. The city council voted wisely in early in 2008 when they banned these accounts. (See my [column](#) from June 4, 2007.)

Elected officials are asked to raise money for other candidates, ballot measures and charities while in office. All three of these can be worthy of raising money for, especially charities and/or notable causes

like raising money for the Library Foundation or our local schools, among others. Each is great on its own merits and provides valuable service to the community.

I have been asked by many groups and even some individuals to raise money for very good causes. However, once "I" as the elected councilmember begin asking developers and others for money for "my special cause," then I set myself and those I represent up for having to "pay back" the one who donated at some future date. The elected official might be an effective fundraiser, but at what price to their independence?

Often residents curse developers one day, but are happy to take their money the next day for their cause.

As a result, I do not have a friends account, nor do I raise money for "pet projects." Sometimes I think my stance might be too harsh. For example, I would love to raise money for schools in my district. However, I believe keeping myself free from influence as best I can is best for everyone. Better to be too cautious than not cautious enough.

I have heard the line before that a politician should be able to take money and be impervious to influence from the donor. Yet, when I look at the reality of politics in this country, I don't believe that is true.

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